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ABSTRACT

This study compared the personality profiles of 30 women who had been incestuously abused as children with a matched comparison group of 30 nonabused women. Women in the incest group self-reported sexual abuse before age 18 by a father or stepfather. Sexual abuse was broadly defined to encompass a range of sexual activities from exhibitionism to sexual intercourse. All subjects completed the California Personality Inventory (CPI) which provides information regarding vocational, educational, social, and familial issues, as well as delinquent and asocial behaviors. Results indicated that incest subjects scored lower on the overall scales of the CPI. Regarding the individual scores, women who had experienced sexual abuse tended to score lower in the areas of sociability, socialization, social presence, self-acceptance, communality, and psychological mindedness. Women who had experienced more intrusive types of sexual abuse (i.e., sexual intercourse) were more likely to indicate problems with self-acceptance and self-confidence in social settings. Women who were incestuously abused at younger ages were more likely to experience internal conflicts and an inability to empathize with others. (Author/NB)

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The Long-Term Psychological Consequences of Father-Daughter Incest

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Poster presented: National Association of School Psychologists, Chicago, IL, April, 1988

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Abstract

The present study compared the personality profiles of women who had been incestuously abused with a matched comparison group. Participants completed the California Personality Inventory (CPI) which provides information regarding vocational, educational, social and familial issues, as well as delinquent and asocial behaviors. Results indicated that incest subjects scored lower on the overall scales of the CPI. Regarding the individual scores, women who had experienced sexual abuse tended to score lower in the areas of sociability, socialization, social presence, self-acceptance, communality and psychological mindedness. Women who had experienced more intrusive types of sexual abuse (i.e., sexual intercourse) were more likely to indicate problems with self-acceptance and self-confidence in social settings. Finally, women who were incestuously abused at younger ages were more likely to experience internal conflicts and an inability to empathize with others.

Introduction

Research examining the long term consequences of intrafamilial child sexual abuse indicates that individuals who experience incestuous abuse often exhibit maladaptive behaviors and/or feelings. Previous research suggests that women with incestuous past may be at greater risk for a variety of psychological disturbances, and dysfunctional interpersonal and

sexual relationships. Unfortunately, some of the previous studies are complicated by methodological problems, which include subjective, unstandardized outcome measures, lack of adequate control groups, and questionable generalizability.

The present study was undertaken in an effort to objectively describe the personality characteristics of adult victims of childhood incestuous abuse. Additionally, efforts were made to determine any effort specific mediating factors, such as type of sexual abuse and age of initiation may have for the long term personality functioning of incest victims.

The study investigated the personality profiles of incestuously abused women (n = 30) with a matched comparison group of nonabused women (n = 30). All subjects were volunteers from undergraduate psychology classes at the University of South Carolina, and were matched for age, race, marital status, and college experiece. Women included in the incest group self-reported sexual abuse before the age of 18 by a father or stepfather. Sexual abuse, forth purpose of the resent study was broadly defined to encompass a range of sexual activities from exhibitionism to sexual intercourse. All participants in the study completed the California Personality Inventory, a standardized personality instrument which yields an overall adjustment scores as well as eighteen individual subscale scores. The CPI provides information regarding vocational, social, familial issues and delinquent and asocial behaviors.

Major Research Findings

Results indicated that compared to nonabused women, women who had as children experienced incestuous abuse had significantly lower overall scores as well as differences on the individual subscales of the CPI. Women who had experienced incestuous abuse scored lower on scales designed to assess socialability (p 01), socialization (.05), social presence (p <.03), self acceptance (p <.03), communality (p <.01), and psychological mindedness (p <.04). These results suggest that women who were incestuously abused were more likely to report lowered feelings of interpersonal adequacy, poise, and self assurance. Incest subjects' scores also indicated less maturity in social settings and were less socially outgoing than comparison subjects. The more intrusive forms of sexual abuse (i.e., attempted and completed sexual intercourse) were associated with reported difficulties in the areas of self-acceptance (p <.001) and social confidence (p <.03). Finally, individuals who reported abuse initiated at younger ages were more likely to indicate internal conflicts (p <.01) and an inability to empathize with others (p <.04).

Overall, these results were consistent with many of the previous studies indicating problems with self-esteem, interpersonal skills, and overall adjustment.

Table 1
Subject Characteristics

Age	Frequency	Percent
18-20	32	54%
21-29	16	26%
30-33	6	10%
40-48	6	10%
Race		
White	40	67%
Black	18	30%
Other	2	3%
Marital Status		
Single	22	74%
Married	4	13%
Separated/Divorced	4	13%
Age at Victimization		
5-6	5	17%
7-8	5	17%
9-10	8	27%
11-12	6	21%
13-14	2	6%
16-17	3	10%
Type of Abuse		
An invitation to do something special	1	3%
Exhibitionism	3	10%
Fondling	5	17%
Touching genitals	11	37%
Intercourse with and without penetration	9	30%
Other (oral and anal activities)	1	3%

Implications

This study departs from past research by using a standardized personality assessment device in order to delineate the long term consequences of intrafamilial abuse. This report indicates that child sexual abuse within the family has potentially detrimental long term personality consequences. However, further knowledge of family and victim characteristics as well as factors mediating the differential consequences of incestuous abuse is still needed in order to better understand, prevent, and treat this special population of child sex abuse victims.

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